

## Premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases is decreasing quickly

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of ill health in Europe; the high prevalence of risk factors like obesity, alcohol consumption and tobacco contributes to this. As a result, one of the core Health 2020 indicators is reducing premature mortality from four major NCDs – cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. As part of Health 2020, Member States in the WHO European Region agreed on the ambitious goal of reducing premature mortality by at least 1.5% annually. New evidence from the European health report 2015 demonstrates that the Region is on track to reach and exceed this target, with an average annual reduction of 2%. Countries with high mortality levels have made the greatest progress, thus reducing differences between countries in the Region. The reduction was also larger for males, resulting in narrowing inequalities between the sexes.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Europe is on track to reduce premature mortality from major NCDs

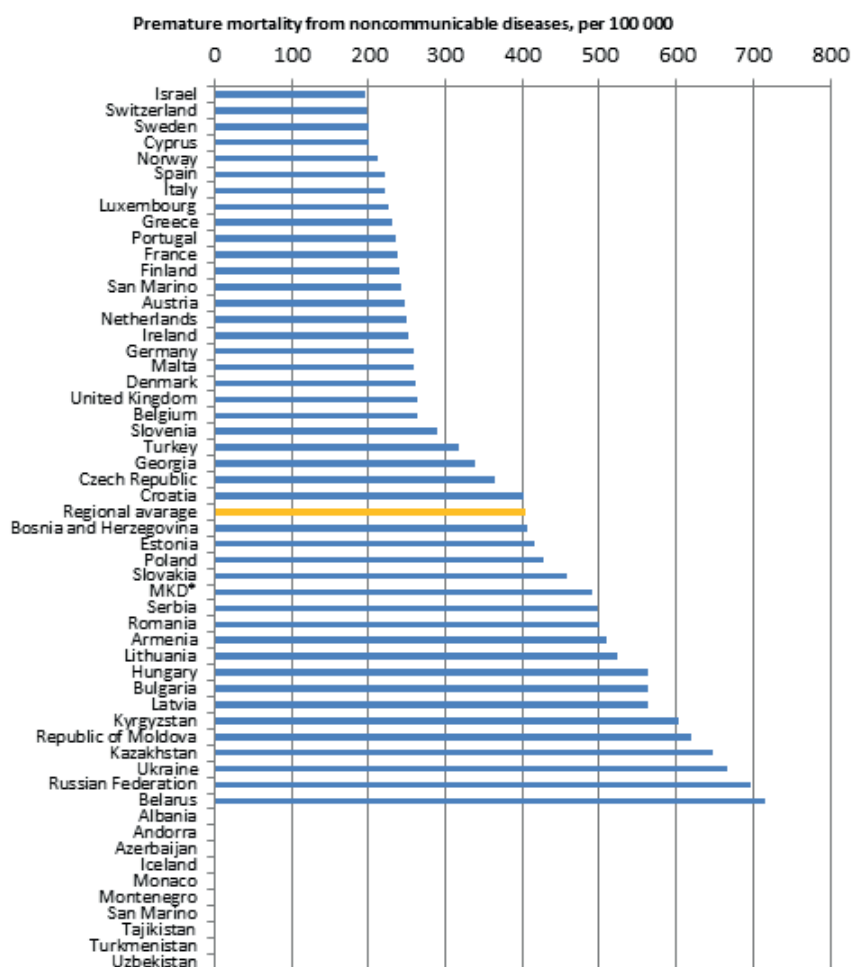
- **The good news:** the annual rate of reduction of premature mortality from NCDs is 2%, which exceeds the Health 2020 target.
- **The challenge:** the impact of risk factors like smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity could mean that this progress is not maintained.

Although decreasing, intercountry differences in premature mortality are still unacceptably high

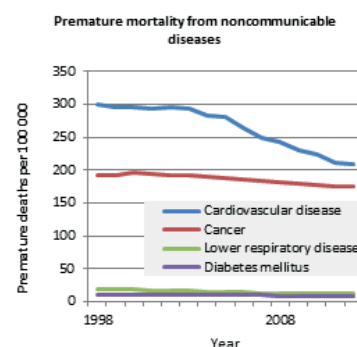
- **The good news:** Member States are taking decisive action and results are encouraging.
- **The challenge:** the gap is still wide, with up to a three-fold difference between the highest and lowest rates.

Risk factors in Europe: a mixed picture

- **The good news:** prevalence of tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption is falling.
- **The challenge:** the rates of tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption in the Region are still the highest in the world and the prevalence of overweight and obesity is increasing – every second European is overweight and every fourth is obese.



\* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



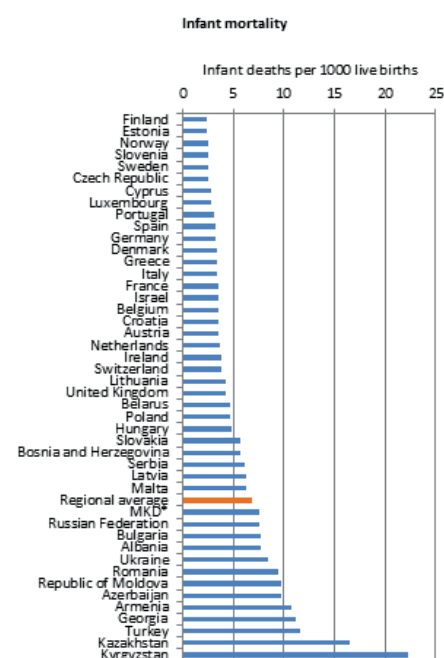
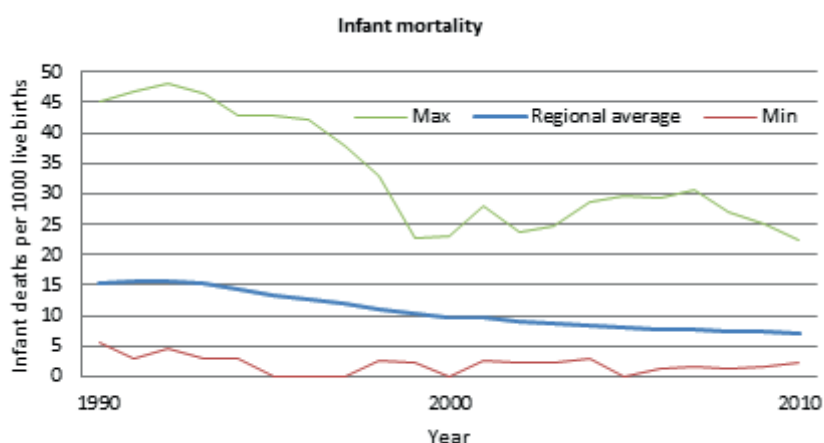
All causes of NCDs are reducing, but at variable rates. Cardiovascular diseases show the fastest progress.

**The infant mortality rate** has fallen steadily in the European Region and has more than halved over the last two decades, reaching historically low levels. This means that fewer infants per 1000 live births are dying before their first birthdays. Inequalities between countries are also reducing, so Europe is well on track to reach the Health 2020 infant mortality target. Nevertheless, 10-fold differences between countries exist in Europe and inequalities can be even larger between population groups within countries.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

### Infant mortality is decreasing

- **The good news:** infant mortality rates have reduced substantially in recent years, reaching an all-time low.
- **The challenge:** 10-fold differences exist between countries with the highest and lowest rates.



## Accelerated implementation efforts are needed to ensure that Europe will reach the Health 2020 targets

The European health report 2015 demonstrates that three years after the introduction of Health 2020 Europe is well on track to reach the two ambitious targets it set; namely, to reduce both premature mortality from NCDs and inequalities and levels of infant mortality. Prevalence of certain risk factors is increasing, however, and this may jeopardize progress towards achievement of goals in the future. Existing inequalities between and within countries are still large and unjustifiable and WHO is therefore working with Member States to reduce them further. Social determinants of health play an important role for both NCDs and infant mortality, and accelerated intersectoral implementation of Health 2020 is needed to sustain the health improvements achieved so far. It is encouraging that more and more countries in Europe are not only aligning their national health policies and plans with Health 2020 but also adopting accountability mechanisms to increase commitment for their implementation; nevertheless, there remains room for improvement.

\* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia